Annual Report – 2025

Dorset Area's 50th anniversary was marked not only by the cake which was cut at the 2024 AGM but also by our 50 favourite walks project in which we invited Dorset Groups and all of our members to nominate their favourite walks for publication on our website. Sadly, this did not attract the level of interest we had hoped for, and we didn't hit the 50 walks target. However, we did get many interesting submissions, and we still hope to publish these on the website in due course.

Elsewhere, volunteers have been very busy as the reports below show.

Highlights include the funding of the Great Chalk Way information board at Okeford Hill, taking the White Hart Link monitors under our wing and making them part of a new 'Dorset Paths Team, a cream tea for our enthusiastic band of Jubilee Trail monitors, completion of the improvement works on the path across the RSPB reserve at Radipole using funding obtained by SDG from the East Berkshire Ramblers' Endowment Fund, EDG's organisation of the Purbeck Plod, WDG's attendance at the Bridport Charter Fair, and celebration of the 30th anniversary of Wessex Wanderers Railway Walks.

A huge thank you to everyone who helps to keep Dorset Area and its groups running: chairs, secretaries, treasurers, footpath secretaries, walk coordinators, webmasters, our brilliant team of walk leaders and anyone I've missed.

We can only keep going because of your commitment to our work.

THANK YOU TO ALL WHO HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THE DORSET AREA ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2025

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General Council 2025 (in brief)

The day began with the approval of the 2024 General Council minutes and then delegates were informed that, following an interview process, HaysMac LLP was the preferred choice for the Auditor. There were no objections from the floor to this appointment.

There were also no objections to the reappointment of the President and Vice Presidents (VP). Sylvia Popham was appointed as a VP. Dan Firmager, Janet Gee, Mark Lavenstein, and Gulshun Rehman were appointed as Trustees.

Motions

- **Resolution to update the Standing Orders for gender neutrality -** Dorset did not support this motion, but it was approved by delegates.
- **Updating Ramblers Articles of Association for full gender neutrality -** Dorset supported this motion, and it was also approved.
- **Ramblers GB 90th Anniversary -** Dorset supported this motion, and it was approved.
- **Preventing the loss of footpaths by adding Cycle Tracks to the definitive maps -** Dorset supported this motion, and it was approved.
- **Overcoming barriers to access -** Dorset supported this motion, and it was approved.
- **Climate emergency action -** Dorset supported this motion, and it was approved.
- **An email system for Area and Group officers to contact members -** Dorset supported this motion, and it was approved.
- **Compliance with Council members' motions -** Dorset did not support this motion, and it was rejected.
- **Information for prospective new walk leaders** - Dorset supported this motion, but it was rejected.

There was also a discussion about taking a different approach to the GC. The suggestions were to have a virtual GC or host it over two days in person, like previous GCs. It appeared that delegates felt an in-person event should be held on one day.

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TREASURER'S REPORT

The Ramblers' financial year finishes on 30 September and at the time of writing the 2024/25 annual accounts for the Dorset Area have already been audited and submitted to the Ramblers Central Office together with those for the Dorset Groups.

After all payments had been made, the Dorset Area accounts remain robust, although a slightly lower budget, which included all Group budgets, was claimed for this year. The accounts for the year again show an overspend of the income received during the year, mainly due to financing an information board for the Great Chalk Way.

All Area Council meetings are now held on Zoom as are two of the four Area Footpath Committee meetings and this has saved in room hire and travelling costs.

As I have mentioned in previous reports, I act as the treasurer for the Wessex Wanderers, an organisation that organises walks during the summer months using the train service on the Bristol to Weymouth railway line. The Wessex Wanderers is now a flexi-group administered by the Dorset Area and 2025 marked 30 years since they started. Wessex Wanderers have now completed their very successful celebratory walks programme for this year.

Jubilee Trail guides are still on sale at a reduced price of £7 (including postage) but sales are slow. All monies from the sale of Jubilee Trail guides and the generosity of donations go to improving the Trail. Sadly, this year we haven't been asked to help with the finance of any major improvements on the Trail.

As will be seen from the accounts, money received to help with Don't Lose your Way expenses and the Dorset Young Walkers flexi-group are administered by the Area as restricted.

In conclusion, may I thank all the Group Treasurers for their hard work in supporting me during the past year and, also, may I thank Martin Ford-Horne FCA for auditing the Area accounts, a very important job, which he has done now for 24 years.

Mike Heckford
Treasurer
October 2025

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MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY REPORT

The number of members in the Dorset Area continued a small decline over the last year and stands at 1352 as at the end of September 2025, a 0.6% drop compared with the same month in 2024. Within the Dorset groups there is a variety of figures, most groups having dropped in number of members. National membership is increasing showing a 2.2% increase over the same time period.

Margaret Kettlewell
Membership Secretary
17th October 2025

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WEBMASTER'S REPORT 2025

Minor changes are made regularly to the Dorset Area Website to keep up with administrative changes and to update information. It was pleasing to add a news item about the golden anniversary of the Dorset Area AGM and then a further news item regarding the installation of the new information board on the Wessex Ridgeway.

We are hoping to add a page on the website detailing favorite walks provided by local groups over the next few months.

Margaret Kettlewell
Webmaster's Report
17th October 2025

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PUBLICITY OFFICER This post is vacant

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EDITOR – DORSET FOOTNOTES

As mentioned to Group leads, Footnotes is currently on pause until a new editor is appointed.

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AREA FOOTPATH SECRETARY'S REPORT 2025

The Area Footpath Committee (AFC) comprises the Area Footpath Secretary, Group Footpath Secretaries, the Countryside Secretary, the Access Officer, and the Jubilee Trail Coordinator, and is chaired by Dorset Area President, Laurie Fairhurst.

In addition to responding to the consultations recorded below (that is where Ramblers are statutory consultees), the Area Footpath Committee and Group Footpath Secretaries may be asked to respond to queries from members of the public, the highway authorities, and other organisations relating to rights of way, or access matters. For example, we have been approached for our views on a re-organisation at Currendon Hill, involving the National Trust and DC Highways Team.

The past year has been relatively quiet for the Committee dealing with applications, path orders and other legal procedures, which are received from the Definitive Map Team at Dorset Council (DC), and from the Transportation Team at Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP) Council. Consultations can either relate to applications under the Highways Act 1980, the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 or the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. At the time of writing, (that is before the final Area Footpath Committee Meeting of the year, which is on November 20th) since the last report in 2024, the footpath secretaries have responded to ten applications for diversions, extinguishments or modifications, and nine pre-application consultations. The latter are those which are assessed by consultees (including the Ramblers) prior to being sent by the applicant to the DC team.

Several Orders are currently with the Secretary of State for determination, but there is a backlog in their Rights of Way department. We have an interest in one of these, and will be submitting a statement of case in support of the Order.

For other rights of way issues, each footpath secretary will work within their locality to a greater or lesser degree, depending upon personal circumstances, interests and commitments. The members of the AFC are only too willing and happy to support new volunteers and answer any questions about aspects of the work involved. In the first instance please contact the Area Footpath Secretary.

The Area Footpath Committee continues to hold the two 'winter' meetings via Zoom, and the two 'summer' ones in person. The Committee feels that, for a number of reasons, this makes sense, as the footpath secretaries hail from all

corners of Dorset, and with the increased cost of motoring, paucity of public transport, and the recognition that driving on country roads, in inclement weather, is becoming increasingly stressful.

Apart from attending the four AFC meetings each year, group footpath secretaries report to their group committees, and respond to enquiries from the Countryside Secretary, relating to planning applications in their area, where public rights of way could be affected. The Ramblers (in Dorset) are consulted on these applications, whilst not being statutory consultees.

Dorset Paths Team

Following a decision to take the monitoring of the White Hart Link under the 'umbrella' of Dorset Area, a new team was set up by Ramblers Central Paths Team, called the Dorset Paths Team, on their volunteer database, to which the WHL Monitors were added. The wider intention of this being that in future, this can be expanded to encompass other monitors, and categories of path volunteers, including Footpath Secretaries.

Don't Lose Your Way

There was some reorganisation within the Paths Team at Ramblers Central Office, which impacted on the DLYW team structure. At the first DLYW Coordinators meeting this year Sophie Reindorp, was introduced as the newly appointed Path Programme Manager, and Rebecca Birrane, the Head of Programmes. The DLYW online map is not going to be updated because of shortage of funds, and it was suggested that the British Horse Society 'Dobbin' one was used.

On Boxing Day 2024, the government announced that the deadline to record historic rights of way in England had been abolished. However, primary legislation is needed to fulfil this commitment to repeal the cut-off date of 1st January 2031, and the Ramblers centrally continues to lobby for this.

Great Chalk Way

The Great Chalk Way is a family of established walking and riding routes linking the Dorset and Norfolk Coasts across central southern England following the ancient trading route along the chalk ridge, forming a coast-to-coast route of around 400 miles. The Dorset section follows the Wessex Ridgeway, and the Dorset Area has contributed to this long-distance route this year by funding an information board at the Okeford Hill Picnic site, which was installed by the Rangers, at no cost. It was unveiled on July 17th by the local MP, Simon Hoare, and the event was attended by Senior DC Rangers, local councillors and Ramblers members.

Photo credit Derek Day

Our continuing thanks go to the Committee, without whose members and work, many of the routes we take for granted would not have been possible. We send our best wishes and thanks to those who have retired this year, and welcome the new additions.

Jan Wardell
Area Footpath Secretary
November 2025

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AREA ACCESS OFFICER'S REPORT

The latest Stretch Progress Report (24th September 2025) for the KC3 England Coast Path in our area shows the following:

Lyme Regis to Rufus Castle - approved in part, not yet open.
Rufus Castle to Lulworth Cove - open
Lulworth Cove to Kimmeridge Bay - not yet approved.
Kimmeridge Bay to Highcliffe - part approved and open

Not in our area, but very controversial, is the proposed route on the Isle of Wight round Osborne House.

Other feedback: The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Outdoor Recreation and Access to Nature has published a report setting out advice to Government on improving public access - RA Central Office will be working to get the recommendations on the Government agenda including a new Access to Nature Bill.

There has been no further information on the proposed update of open access land on Explorer maps.

We have already submitted comments to RA Head Office on the proposal to extend CROW to woodland, riverbanks etc.

Mike Beams
Access Officer
October 2025

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COUNTRYSIDE SECRETARY'S REPORT

A Ramblers Countryside Secretary (in some Ramblers areas known as the Environmental Protection Officer) works to protect and enhance the landscapes in which we walk, and the paths and access land which we use, primarily by monitoring planning applications and making comments on any proposed developments which are either going to impact directly and adversely on the rights of way network, or on the wider countryside. The job also involves commenting on relevant plans such as Local Plans, Neighbourhood Plans and Local Transport Plans.

1. Planning applications

Dorset Ramblers is consulted by the Dorset Council planning team about any planning applications for developments which are close to public rights of way. Many of the applications which are referred to us do not need comment (e.g. they might relate to changes in the windows of a listed building or a minor household extension).

Our aim in making these comments and objections is to ensure that public rights of way are properly recognised and that they are not simply 'diverted' on to pavements, ensuing that residents will be able to use them to access both local facilities, and the wider path network, on foot. In the period 1 October 2024 to 30 September 2025, we were consulted about approximately **835 applications**. We commented on 31 of these and objected to four. In most of the cases, our comments were about the need to keep the right of way open and available for safe public use, both during the development process and subsequently. In cases where it appeared that diversion of public rights of way will be necessary to allow the development to go ahead, we asked for early consultation about the proposed change. The objections were made in the following cases:

P/FUL/2025/04214: Biosecure link corridor at chicken farm, Sturminster Marshall. We objected to this proposal because the title of the planning application specifically mentioned stopping up the right of way which crosses the site. (A planning application itself cannot divert or close a right of way.) It was also our view that the path could be diverted rather than closed. Our objection had a very swift impact, with the applicant proposing a diversion, although not that which we had proposed. In order for the development to go ahead it will be necessary to move the path.

P/FUL/2025/03574: solar farm, south of Motcombe Road, Motcombe. We objected to this proposal because of the adverse impact on an attractive and valued landscape (contrary to the National Planning Policy Framework, the NPPF)) and views from rights of way. There are also issues with a public right of way sharing access with vehicles on a site access road.

P/FUL/2025/05287: Erect one dwelling, The Barn Shepherds Hill Buckhorn Weston Whilst we had no objection to the principle of the proposed development, but objected to the application as presented because it failed to mention the existence of public right of way N58/15 which runs through the site and would, it appears, run through the garage of the proposed building. The application form states that no diversion or extinguishment of public rights of way will be necessary.

P/FUL/2025/03066: Solar Farm and battery energy storage system at Caswell Farm, Ryme Intrinseca (objection actually made in October 2025). We objected to this proposal in its present form because of its adverse impact on the landscape (the views from public rights of way) and on a specific right of way but said that we would be happy to review our position if the development was reduced in size. We also suggested mitigation measures to improve the impact on the right of way.
I would like to thank Jan Wardell and all the Group Footpath Secretaries for their help in dealing with these planning applications.

Proposed Waste incinerator on Portland

We objected to this and so have been taking a close interest in the Stop the Portland Waste Incinerator (SPWI) campaign group's challenge to the decision by the Secretary of State to grant planning permission for the energy recovery facility on Portland, was heard by the Court of Appeal on 7 October. The previous legal challenge was lost in the High Court. A Court of Appeal judge permitted the claim to proceed, stating that the planning inspector's reasoning had been "sparse". At the time of writing the judgment was awaited.

2. Planning policies

I made a brief comment on the draft Melbury Abbas and Cann Neighbourhood Plan. I have also commented on Dorset Council's Draft Local Nature Recovery Strategy consultation, stressing the importance of access to nature for health and wellbeing, and on the Dorset National Landscape Draft Management Plan 2026 – 2031.

At the time of writing I was preparing comments on the Dorset Local Plan Options consultation. This consultation sets out opportunities for meeting the development needs of the Dorset Council area, largely in response to central government's commitment to addressing the shortage of housing, to enable economic growth and deliver essential infrastructure to enable this growth. I am also preparing our comments on The Local Transport Plan (LTP) which sets out goals and policies for improving transport in Dorset over the next 15 years. This plan is developed jointly with Bournemouth, Poole and Christchurch Council (BCP). The plan aims to help everyone get around, make travel safe and easy, support jobs and homes by helping towns and villages grow in a suitable way, protect our local environment by cutting down on pollution and to encourage more people to walk, wheel or cycle, reducing traffic congestion and promoting a healthier lifestyle. There are encouraging mentions of improvements to rights of way and to trailways. Unfortunately, the LTP cross references to the Rights of Way Improvement Plan which has still not been produced by Dorset Council, despite an initial consultation in 2021.

3. The Local Access Forum (LAF)

The LAF is a statutory advisory body which authorities such as Dorset and Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole must appoint to advise them on access issues. (The LAF serves both councils.) I was re-appointed to the LAF in 2021, representing the interests of walkers, and I am currently the vice-chairman. There has been some improvement in Dorset Council's support of the LAF over the past year, and we've had speakers from Natural England on progress with the KCIII England Coast Path, and talks on the Stour Valley Project, the Wareham Arc Project, SANGS (Sites of Alternative Natural Greenspace and a presentation from the Loders Transport Group. However, despite this activity it is difficult to ascertain how much notice Dorset Council takes of the LAF's advice. As the LAF link to the *Dorset National Landscape,* I have continued *to* attend their twice-yearly Board meeting and receive regular updates on their work.

Janet Davis
Area Countryside Secretary
October 2025

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JUBILEE TRAIL

Monitoring
The Jubilee Trail is divided into 22 sections, each with between 1 and 3 monitors. There are currently 23 monitors and 19 of the sections have allocated monitors.

Carole Marsh, Sheila Davis, Deidre Tyrell and Heather Picken have all stood down this year having given many years of support, whilst we have welcomed Linda Tolman and Rebecca Sutherland as new monitors.

The three sections that do not have allocated monitors are in the East Dorset area, and one new monitor has been identified who we are expecting to take over two of the sections after a trial monitor walk. This will leave just one section between Moreton and Bere Regis without an allocated monitor.

We would be delighted to welcome more people as monitors in all areas of the Trail: monitors do not need to be members of Ramblers as long as they are happy to be signed up as Ramblers volunteers.

The monitors walk their section of the Jubilee Trail at least twice a year in order to check signage, cut back vegetation where possible and report more significant problems to Dorset Council for resolution.

Social event
A well-attended social event was arranged for the monitors at Beaminster on 22nd September 2026. It consisted of a lovely 5-mile walk including the Jubilee Trail and the Wessex Ridgeway. It was led by Chris Sims, who is the monitor for that section, and was followed by scones and cream in a local café.

Problem reports and maintenance
There have been about 95 problem reports (excluding duplicates) raised along the Jubilee Trail in 2025. These have been raised by our monitors and by members of the public. Thirty remained open on the day of the report and closure rates have generally been reasonable. However, some problems have existed for years and show no signs of being resolved. The worst is a lane near Mapperton in the west of the county, which is constantly underwater, even in the dry periods.

I also have expressed concern to Dorset Council about the danger at the two crossings of the A35 at Bere Regis and Winterborne Abbas.

Guidebooks

Guidebooks have continued by be sold at a small number of outlets across the county and also directly from our website. The income from these helps to fund improvements along the route.

User comments

We have continued to get very positive feedback from walkers, including this one in April:

> *Just a note to say how much we are enjoying walking the Jubilee Trail…. So many highlights and some are just small things that are wonderful to see…. The Dorset landscape is so amazing…. Thank you for keeping this fantastic long-distance route available for people to discover and enjoy.*

Chris Moyle
16th October

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GROUP REPORTS

North Dorset

Regular Committee meetings were organised for January, April and July which allowed Committee to review the health of the Group. This was done by considering reports from the Walk Log, the state of the walks programme and the financial state from the Treasurer. There was discussion of proposals from Dorset Area and the central Ramblers administration in terms of both local and national importance and considered responses were developed.

There has been regular e-mail, and telephone communications requesting information on the Group and its activities with a view to the possibility of joining the Group. These enquiries require careful and sympathetic consideration and many of these requests turn out in a positive manner with new people joining the Group. However, requests for dogs on walks remain problematic and require a diplomatic response as we generally advise only bringing registered assistance dogs (RAD).

Communication with Dorset Area also occurs on a regular basis. This is done by sending Area reports to Committee and reporting Committee meeting minutes to Dorset Area. This provides a useful flow of information between ourselves and Area.

A Mission Statement was also prepared for the Committee.

Julia Miller
NDG Footpath Secretary elect and temporary Secretary for the AGM

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South Dorset

Membership.
The total membership is 240 an increase of 16 on last year. There were 35 new members and 19 who have resigned or not renewed their membership since this time last year. It is now standard for members to register an email address and there are now only 11 members who receive communications by post.

Walks.
Although SDG has 33 walk leaders on its books at the moment, only 17 are active and leading walks. Despite that, those leading walks this year have enabled a continual and varied choice of walks throughout 2025, both mid-week and at the weekends. 92 walks were placed on the walks calendar of which 8 were cancelled due to bad weather etc. Of the 84 walks that went ahead, 49 were mid-week and 35 were at the weekends.

There was a great deal of consternation last summer with the requirement from Ramblers headquarters this summer that existing walk leaders would need to complete the online training (or have completed 12 walks in 3 years) to be eligible to continue leading walks in 2026. We expect to have 19 active qualified walk leaders from 1st January 2026 which includes 2 new members

Group Holiday.
In June this year, a group of twenty-eight members travelled north to the Abbey Hotel in Malvern for a week's walking on the Malvern Hills and surrounding area. The week's holiday was organised by Ramble Worldwide and included two guided walks each day, one long and one shorter.

In 2026 we have booked again with Ramble Worldwide to in Praia de Ancora on the Costa Verde Northern Portugal. There we be two grades of walk each walking day, Grade 4 (Moderate) and Grade 6 (Challenging) and one free day. There will be both coastal and mountain walking. In addition, there is the option of a short extension in the city of Porto

Socials.
We didn't have a social secretary last year, but other people have helped pick up the slack, with a Walk Leader's lunch at the Countryman Inn, a history walk around Weymouth town centre which included a stop for ice creams and lunch in White Pepper (South Indian), and this year's Christmas lunch will be at the Black Dog Broadmayne,

Finance
The South Dorset Group has 2 accounts:

- The Main account for all income and expenditure on behalf of Ramblers.
- The Social Fund for all income and expenditure for activities that the South Dorset Group decides to engage in for the benefit of its members, in accordance with Ramblers rules and procedures.

Our income decreased to £601, mainly due to a smaller contribution from Ramblers Walking Holidays Walking Partnership scheme. The standard Area Grant of £331 was slightly higher than last year, due to slightly increased

Membership numbers. Our expenditure on the Main account, at £277.17 was lower than the previous years due to continued use of a member's house for meetings. Expenditure included leaflets, a walk leaders training and lunch and hire of a hall for the AGM.

We are continuing to look at spending some of our surplus funds on signage on the Ramblers Jubilee Trail in the SDG area.

Social Fund The account was only used for the Xmas lunch because all holiday payments were made by members directly to Ramblers Holidays. It has a small surplus of just over £200 that has built up over the years.

Publicity
Leaflets including our 'Join Us' inserts, which relate specifically to our group, are regularly distributed to local walking shops such as Mountain Warehouse, Trespass and Great Western Camping, as well as to local libraries and other information points. Several local magazine publications have been contacted requesting that they include our Group in their directory of local organisations.

Our Weebly website continues to be maintained and updated on a regular basis. SDG members are encouraged to use it, as it provides a useful source of information copies of minutes' news and details of future events. Our private Facebook page is also regularly updated, to share photographs of walks and any interesting news items.

F**ootpaths and Countryside.**
Currently SDG members fulfil these roles for both SDG and Dorset Area (and therefore information will not be duplicated here).

Update from Last Year
As reported last year, in the summer of 2024, SDG made a successful grant application to central office for funding to improve the surface of the public right of way which runs across the RSPB reserve at Radipole. We can confirm that the raised level of the path has made it accessible throughout the year, and it no longer floods when river water levels are high. Two walks (one by SDG, and one joint SDG and WDG walk) have successfully used it at a time of year when it was often under water. Also, SDG walk leaders have continued to support the Wessex Wanderers Railway Walks programme, and one walk this year included the Radipole path – the improvements received very positive feedback from all walkers.

Sarah Moyle

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East Dorset

It seemed like a warm year as soon as the first heat wave was announced but reliable dry weather is just what walkers love. Plenty of water, sun block and shady trees make for a memorable ramble. Thanks to our walk leaders we have had a great program of walks on offer once again this year, even though it has been one of the hottest.

However, Head Office have been going through some major changes and consequently many members have been experiencing the results of upgraded and altered practices, not least of all our walk leaders. For some time, the Ramblers have been reviewing the best and safest ways to introduce inexperienced walkers into the Ramblers family. Consultations have taken place and feedback reviewed resulting in significant modifications in walk leadership. Not everyone has been happy with the changes but overall, the idea was to make walking as safe as possible for folk starting off on their 'walking journey.' We now have online instructions and a printed handbook outlining all the joys and pitfalls that a group of walkers may encounter.

Focussing on our East Dorset Group we continue to function very successfully, and our steering Committee remains strong. Yet again we managed to organise and put on the annual Purbeck Plod. This mid-summer walking challenge attracts walkers from all over the country, and we as a Ramblers Branch organise and marshal the event with support from LDWA. Fortunately, the weather was kind again this year. Not too hot with a brisk breeze and consequently plenty of walkers turned up for the event. A fine day was had by all, and I would like to thank everyone in our branch for their fantastic participation in this glorious event.

Our social events have been a joy too. The annual meal is always a winner and this year our Social Secretary organised a coach trip to Winchester. Again, the weather was kind, and a fine six-mile walk was an option for many, while less athletic folk enjoyed a day wandering through the water meadows, the historic treasures of Winchester and its famous Cathedral. A fine old Winchester pub was a wise option while waiting for our coach home with our fellow travellers to reconvene.

At last year's AGM we had an interesting talk and slide show by Rosemary Legrand titled 'Spectacular South African Flora and Fauna.' This year our AGM is on Saturday November 22nd at 2 o'clock and we have a talk by John Hubbard on 'Dorset Village Architecture'.

You may have been disappointed to see the disappearance of our regular 'Rambling On' Newsletter due to our Editor having to step down due to health matters. However, due to excellent NHS care and treatment our esteemed editor is now fit and well enough to resume his good work. Rambling On will be back in publication once again. Yey!

Happy Rambling.
Roger Eede EDG Chair

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West Dorset

Another soggy winter didn't stop the Group enjoying a variety of walks, from 5 to 10miles in length, on the coast, in town and down some remote 'Bottoms'. An effort has been made to add more interest including a trek to see the snowdrops at Compton Valance with lunch on offer proving especially popular. We have also trialled walks led jointly with SDR to widen the scope on offer.

Although walks are advertised in Bridport TIC and local magazines, numbers rarely reach double figures.

We attended this year's Bridport Charter Fair in May. It was low cost (£10), raised our profile locally, attracted some potential new members, and advertised other work undertaken by Ramblers. Membership currently stands at 162, 4 less than last year.

Walkers old and new enjoyed the New Year lunch at Broadwindsor with some of us braving the weather for a ramble beforehand. A repeat is planned next January, hopefully with better weather.

16 members spent 4 nights in April at Abingworth on the South Downs, with the opportunity to view rewilding being undertaken at the Knepp Estate on the way. This trip was so successful, 11 then took a 'tread lightly', stress free, bank holiday break in August at HF Holnicote, North Devon, with all walks starting and finishing at the house. Next spring it's back to St Ives with the sustainable bonus of being able to let the train take the strain.

The bank balance stands at £1098 with £500 earmarked for the Jubilee trail. A new bridge at Litton Cheney, to which the group gave some funding last year, is now in place with a small group of us making use of it just last month.

Our greatest concern is the lack of new volunteers both for the committee and as walk leaders. Current leaders are in the process of updating their training, with most being able to use the experience route of 12 walks in 3 years and others being mentored through online training. We are trialling holding some committee meetings online and also exploring the possibility of merging with another Group.

Heather Thomson
Secretary WDR

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Dorset 4050 Walkers Group

The Dorset 4050 Walkers group has had another very successful year in 2025. Our membership is currently around 83, a little lower than last year's total, but we have around 30 regular walkers. We have had walks on most Sundays through the year, mostly within the 10-15 mile range, and have regularly had turnouts of 15-20. We have welcomed several new members during the year who have become regular walkers. As ever, we continue to rely on a small number of walk leaders and our walks tend to be confirmed at short notice, but we are very grateful to our walk leaders for keeping such a good programme of walks going.

Our regular four-day walking trip to Porlock took place in late June and was well attended, with everyone enjoying a variety of Exmoor and South West Coast Path walks. We are having a change in 2026, with a four-day trip to southern Snowdonia instead, and plans for this are well under way. In addition, this year we had a walking weekend in the Bristol area.

We continue to advertise the walks online and on our Facebook page, which has over 750 members and is used to share photographs of the group walks - hopefully a good means of attracting new members. We held a very enjoyable and well-attended post-Christmas social event in Poole in January.

Group funds currently stand at £462.19 after some expenditure this year on walk leaders' expenses in preparation for the Porlock weekend, group transport costs for a linear walk during the Porlock trip, and contributions to committee meeting expenses.

Hilary Jordan
Group Secretary

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Wessex Wanderer Railway Walks (Flexi Group)

Referring to last year's annual report you will know that it is thirty years this year since the Wessex Wanderers Railway Walks first began.

Despite the unhelpful two hourly Heart of Wessex train service, the walks have been well attended this year, once again the best since 2019, but it was disappointing that, as in previous years, no Dorset Area members went on most of the walks which took place in Dorset.

We do ask that all Groups add these walks to their Group programmes but not all of them do. This can be done by simply including a link to our website on the appropriate days as my local Group (Severnside) does whether there is already a walk on any of the days or not and no matter where the walks are taking place.

With regards to the thirtieth anniversary in the end, it was decided that it wasn't practical to produce a special souvenir programme so instead we had souvenir leaflets and posters designed and printed which were then distributed far and wide.

There were walks from or to all the stations along the line which was fantastic, and thanks go to our Leaders Chris & Sarah, Sally and Alison & Lawrence (Dorset Area), Sonia, Tony and co-leader Cleve (Somerset Area), Val (Wiltshire Area), David, Margaret, Jonathan, Joy, and Dorothy (Avon Area). Mick (Gloucestershire Area).

There were twenty-seven walks on the programme, the first being (according to Walk Magazine) a 'Pub Crawl' around Bristol which I led. We passed by at least thirty real ale pubs but clearly didn't go in them or we would have been 'crawling' back to Temple Meads station had we not passed out by then!

The final walk on the programme was in conjunction with the Dursley Walking Festival, but which was badly impacted by engineering works with bus replacement services to and from Cam & Dursley railway station.

Thanks to Val for typing up the programme this year and the other volunteers who have helped in one way or another, Joy as the official Programme Co-Ordinator and Mike (Dorset Area) for dealing with our finances.

Thanks also to Ken (Avon Area) for administering our splendid website, Judith (Somerset Area) who set up and maintains Facebook and Instagram accounts for us and Alison for posting our walks on Walk Manager.

So, with the publication of my 'star' letter with regards to the WWWs in the Spring edition of Walk Magazine and the mention of the WWWs in the Summer edition, we enjoyed some excellent publicity which surely helped boost the number of people on the majority of the walks, many for the first time, including a lady from Cardiff after reading my letter in Walk.

The 2025 annual Winter Get Together took place in Frome in February, all thanks to Tony who organised it all as well as leading the pre-lunch walk.

We also enjoyed another get together in July which was the Thirtieth Anniversary Reunion. This was held in the TransWilts/GWR meeting room on Platform 1 at Westbury railway station. Thanks to Sue Blake (Dorset Area) for contacting as many past Leaders and supporters as possible and generally helping me with the organisation.

Those attending brought their own lunches and Great Western Railway gave us an amazing cake plus small gluten free ones, in appreciation and recognition of all the work we have done over the last thirty years in highlighting and introducing people to the wonderful countryside along the Heart of Wessex (Bristol to Weymouth) railway line. I also received a personal letter of thanks from Mark Hopwood CBE, Managing Director of GWR as well as warm congratulations from Lucy Robinson, Chair of the Ramblers.

We were delighted that redoubtable 'Campaigning' Kate Ashbrook was able to join us and who gave a short congratulatory speech. Kate also went on the walk which followed lunch and, true to form, immediately reported some footpath problems encountered on the way.

If you refer to our website www.wessexrailwaywalks.org.uk you will find all there is to know about the WWWs, including a picture of the celebratory cake.

The End of Season meeting is booked for 15 November 2025 and will be held in the meeting room at Westbury railway station, which as a charity, we do not have to pay hire fees.

However, we face an uncertain future unless we get some more volunteers to help run the Group. Joy is opting out as Co-Ordinator, a position she has held for a number of years, and I don't intend to do as much as I have been doing over the last few years.

I don't plan to opt out altogether though and would continue to liaise with GWR with regards to Leaders passes, the Community Rail Partnerships who support us; attend their meetings and Dorset Area's AGMs, as well as leading one or two walks, albeit much slower and shorter than I once did, being the only person left who has led since the beginning.

Then, of course, there is the Governance Review and what that may bring although, at the time of writing because of the feedback to the proposals, Areas will remain as an entity for the time being at least so if the WWW FlexiGroup continues it should remain being hosted by Dorset Area.

And finally, GWR will be taken back into public ownership sometime in the near future although one hopes they will be able to continue with their community-based work and support.

Sylvia Popham (Avon Area)

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Bournemouth Happy Monday Walkers (Flexi Group)

Our current membership stands at 165 up from 132. We continue to offer two walks each Monday to cope with the growing number of walkers. From next month we will offer a shorter walk on the first Monday of each month.

Over the last year we have recruited and trained a number of Walk Leaders to spread the load as week offer more walks. We design and navigate all our routes using the free OutdoorActive app and have an extensive library of walks in our area, available to all via our web site.

We continue to expand our web site to attract new walkers and provide information to our members and the general public - https://bournemouthmondayramblers.org.uk/

Finally, we are looking forward to our Christmas meal - with awards for members with the most miles walked.

DAVID MITCHELL

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Dorset Young Walkers (Flexi Group)

The Dorset Young Walkers is seeking to attract new members, especially walk leaders as I am the only leader in the group. Since the previous AGM, there have been walks in:

- Southbourne – October
- Ringwood Forest – June
- Sherbourne – April
- Wareham Forest – January
- New Forest – December

David Coleman
Dorset Young Walkers

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Report compiled and edited by David Coleman
Dorset Area Secretary
November 2025